

*Bill will extend access, end health insurance discrimination, provide choice and reduce costs*

With Rep. Peter Welch's support, the U.S. House on Saturday night passed historic legislation that will provide health care stability and security to all Americans. After months of debate, the Affordable Health Care for America Act (H.R. 3962) was approved by a vote of 220 to 215.

The landmark legislation will extend access to 36 million people, covering 96 percent of Americans. It will end abusive insurance company practices like denying coverage to those with preexisting conditions and dropping coverage of those who become sick.

H.R. 3962 includes a public health insurance option that will increase patient choice and drive down prices. The bill moves away from the fee-for-service model and focuses on improving patient care.

"Tonight we took a momentous step forward in our century-long quest to provide health security and stability to all Americans. While this legislation surely is not perfect, it brings us closer than ever before to a health care system that works for all Americans. It extends access, ends health insurance discrimination, provides more choice and reduces costs," Welch said. "Tonight's vote signifies not the final step in our nation's effort to guarantee quality health coverage to all Americans, but a proud step in the right direction."

The Affordable Health Care for America Act includes a number of provisions sponsored and advocated by Welch:

- Public Health Insurance Option – Welch-supported provision creates a voluntary, public health insurance option to compete with private insurers, adding choice and reducing costs.
- Prescription Drug Price Negotiation for Seniors – Welch amendment requires the federal government to negotiate Medicare Part D drug prices directly with pharmaceutical companies, cutting prescription drug costs for seniors.

- Extended Coverage for Young People – Welch-supported amendment allows young people through the age of 26 to remain on their parents' health plans.
- Repeal of Anti-Trust Exemption for Insurance Companies – Welch-supported amendment ends the insurance industry's exemption from anti-trust laws, eliminating price fixing and market allocation.
- Preservation of Vermont's Medicaid Waiver – Welch amendment allows Vermont's Medicaid waiver to continue under new system.
- Promotion of Accountable Care Organizations – Welch provision based on research by the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy creates ACOs, which reward the quality and efficiency of care, rather than the volume and intensity of services.
- Blueprint for Health – Welch provision based on Vermont model promotes patient-centered medical homes which compensate primary care providers for managing and coordinating their patient's care.
- Reform of Medicare Geographic Disparities – Welch-supported amendment requires a two-year, Institute of Medicine study of geographic variations in Medicare reimbursements and a subsequent transition to a quality-based system.

According to House estimates, the Affordable Health Care for America Act will improve employer-based coverage for 381,000 Vermonters and provide credits to help 156,000 Vermont households pay for coverage. It will provide coverage for 24,000 uninsured Vermonters, improve Medicare for 106,000 Vermonters and close the prescription drug donut hole for 7,600 Vermont seniors.